

# The Utah Democrat: A Critical and Historical Analysis of the Rise and Fall of the Utah Democrats

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*This essay attempts to answer two central questions by looking at the history of Utah's Democratic Party: "Why did Democrats lose power in the state of Utah?" and "How did Utah Democrats lose enough members to become the super-minority?" Specifically, issues unique to Utah and several pivotal historical events are identified. There is an emphasis on party platforms, the development of the Republican Party, and key national issues which have influenced state politics. An analysis of how the Utah Democratic Party defines itself today is also provided, emphasizing diversity within the party and how the party may grow. Lastly, theories as to how Utah Democrats may regain power, and a brief insight into what the future holds for the party, are proposed.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The history of the Democratic Party in the state of Utah reads much like an amusement park ride: intense and exciting, with incredible highs and equally riveting lows. Currently, Utah Democrats are few in numbers, making it hard to believe that only two generations ago Democrats were the majority party in Utah (Dean 1983). As history has unfolded, the tides have turned and Republicans now overwhelmingly dominate Utah politics. Not only do they dominate, the Utah GOP has been unanimously dubbed the super-majority. This leads to two central questions: "Why did the Democrats lose power in the state of Utah?" and "How did the Utah Democrats lose so many members as to become the super-minority?" This essay will attempt to answer these questions by looking at the history of Utah's Democratic Party.

Specifically, issues unique to Utah and several pivotal historical events will be identified. To gain better understanding there will be an emphasis on party platforms, the development of the Republican Party, and key national issues which have influenced state politics. There will also be an analysis of how the Utah Democratic Party defines itself today, with emphasis on diversity within the party. Lastly, theories as to how Utah Democrats may regain power and a brief insight into what the future holds for the party will be proposed.

## HISTORY OF THE UTAH DEMOCRATS

Historically, Utah has a long record of successful Democrats. When Utah was first settled by pioneers in the nineteenth century, these settlers did not claim membership to either major political party (Dean 1983). The early settlers of Utah were rebels that had come from places where they had been persecuted. For this reason, they were very idiosyncratic in their government and policy making. This included the creation of their own political party, "The People's Party," which was a church-operated entity to which all of the Mormon pioneers subscribed (Grow 1963). Utah functioned on this one-party system until applying for statehood. It was through the statehood application process that the Church originally sought to move towards conforming to national standards (Grow 1963). Most significantly, this meant participating in the national political processes. Hence, the church began assigning families to either the Republican or Democratic parties. This was done by Church leaders who would knock on household doors or visit during church ceremonies and randomly assign every other family, or split right and left sides of the congregation (Grow 1963).

However, these were merely assigned political affiliations. Many of the early Utah settlers actually affiliated more with the Democratic Party (Dean 1983). Democrats have long been known as "The Party for the People" and have been largely representative of poor and working families. Early Utahns fit this demographic, thus making them sympathetic to the Democratic cause.

The early 1900s were a time of growth for Utah

Democrats, and as the years passed Democrats continued to gain power, reaching a political peak in 1936 (Dean 1983). During this phenomenal year Democrats held all of Utah's congressional seats, the governorship, all of the statehouse offices, all seats in the Senate except one, and all but four seats in the House of Representatives (Dean 1983). In fact, it could be said that the Democrats at this time held a supermajority.

Also during the 1930s, events taking place on a national level were lending power to Utah Democrats. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had just completed his first term. His New Deal program was successfully leading the United States from the hardships of the Great Depression (Tanner 1996). Even so, LDS church leaders were opposed to FDR's New Deal programs, presumably because the plan entailed a more involved and centralized federal government. In the 1936 elections the Church formally endorsed FDR's Republican opponent, Alfred Landon (Dean 1983). Poll results showed that Utah residents disagreed with the endorsement of the Church and FDR swept the state with over sixty-nine percent of the vote (Dean 1983). The LDS church made a public error in choosing not to endorse a popular incumbent and well-liked President. Roosevelt's strong commitment to the Democrats and his successful Presidency fueled nationwide support for the Democratic Party. These events helped propel Utah Democrats to strong dominance over Republicans from 1936 to the early 1950s.

Beginning in the 1950s, partisan balance began to reshape Utah politics, with the Republicans gaining more support (Dean 1983). The Republican Party began to get more organized while the Democrats seemed to take their lead for granted. For the next decade the parties continued to exchange powers, bringing back a more moderate and balanced system. Brigham Young University scholar Stewart Grow solicited his opinion on the political climate of this era:

The strength of the two parties in Utah is now so evenly balanced that elections are usually won or lost on the attractiveness of candidates, the efficiency of the campaign organization and techniques, and the influence of national trends and state conditions (Grow 1963).

Even still, there may have been signs that the political demographic in Utah was changing as early as the election of 1950.

A vicious Senatorial race between incumbent Democrat Elbert Thomas and Republican newcomer Wallace Bennett could be viewed as the beginning the transformation. During the campaign Republicans actively targeted Thomas by attempting to expose his political weaknesses, specifically his congressional record and his elderly age (Jonas 1951). Many of his opponents felt he had not done enough for the citizens of Utah and that it was time for him to move on (Jonas 1951). A third, and more damning attack, alleged that Thomas was associated with Communists (Jonas 1951). While the allegations were never confirmed, Thomas did a poor job of defending himself and largely avoided the accusations. Adding to

this, Bennett was younger and more charismatic, well-connected, and had no political record that could be used against him.

Thomas was a well-known politician, running for a fourth term. He had a large support base of laborers, teachers, and agriculturalists. However, he lacked support from rural counties, specifically with members of the Utah Farm Bureau, whose leadership had publicly opposed him (Jonas 1951). The business community largely supported Bennett, a popular businessman. Bennett was also supported by higher-ups in the LDS Church, while Thomas, during his incumbency, had failed to surround himself with influential citizens of the community (Jonas 1951).

Shortly before the election, the Salt Lake County LDS Law Observance and Enforcement Committee—a church-organized committee formed with the purpose of limiting gambling, prostitution, horse racing, and alcohol consumption and sales—released an endorsement piece (Jonas 1951). The committee opposed seventeen Democratic candidates, while only opposing two Republican candidates. Senator Thomas was one of the seventeen Democrats.

The committee's judgments were supposed to have been based on a candidate questionnaire. However, some Democratic candidates claimed to have never received the questionnaire (Jonas 1951). Originally the results were sent to only forty church leaders, but copies were made and the letter became widely circulated, even reaching beyond the borders of Salt Lake County (Jonas 1951). The advantage given to Republican candidates appeared obvious. Political scientist, Frank Jonas, offered his sentiments on the disparity:

The action of the Law Observance and Enforcement Committee was only an overt expression of a preference which was entertained by the Church generally. The General Authorities of the Church are in the main Republicans; the few exceptions are nominal Democrats whose thinking and utterances have never differed from those of the more highly placed Republicans (Jonas 1951).

Democratic leaders at the time fought to have the church retract the endorsement (Jonas 1951). They were eventually successful in this, but the damage was already done. Senator Thomas was ousted from his position and Bennett won the race with a respectable 54.2 percent of the vote (Jonas 1951). Many factors contributed to the loss for Thomas, but the last minute endorsement of the LDS Law Observance and Enforcement Committee could be viewed as the final blow.

#### NATIONAL INFLUENCE ON LOCAL POLITICS

The events of the 1950 race may have been a forewarning of what trouble lay ahead for the Utah Democratic Party. In 1964, Democrat Calvin Rampton was elected governor. He was the only Governor in the history of Utah to ever complete three terms (McCormick 2004). History describes his time in office as one of economic prosperity, growth, and balance for the state of Utah (McCormick 2004). During his first

term, Governor Rampton led the state by better capitalizing on Utah's tourism industry, hence stimulating the state's economy. He supported higher education by requesting a 37 percent increase in spending from the Utah Legislature. This increase came at a vital time when Utah's universities were swelling from the first wave of Baby Boomers entering college (Utah Democrat 1967).

His first term ran from 1965-1968, a very tumultuous time in the United States. The late sixties brought with them many controversial issues, such as civil rights, women's liberation, the Vietnam War, and the sexual revolution. These controversial issues caused a stir among religious communities across the nation. Utah was no exception and experienced a surge in conservatism (Dean 1983). With sensitive political issues at the forefront of an election year, Democratic Party leaders issued caution to party members. Wally Sandack, then Democratic State Party Chair, advised party members, "The Vietnam War is creating division among the party, party executives urge Utah Democrats not to make it a state issue" (Utah Democrat 1968).

Realistically though, it was nearly impossible for state politicians to isolate themselves from poignant public issues. As the state's most powerful elected official, Governor Rampton stood firm in his Democratic views. While not directly coming out in opposition of the war, he made clear his support for lowering the legal voting age to eighteen (Utah Democrat 1967). Since many members of the youth population strongly opposed the war, supporting their right to vote may have signaled his agreement with their cause. Governor Rampton also made it clear that all people regardless of race, creed, sex, or national origin were welcome in Utah, and welcome in the Democratic Party (Utah Democrat 1967). His firm stance on these issues may have fueled the disagreements between the parties.

This pivotal era in American history led to substantial gains in political power by the Utah Republican Party. Conservatives across the nation were banding together and organizing many different Political Action Committees (PACs), such as the Eagle Forum and Grass Roots (Dean 1983). In Utah, a substantial amount of political influence continued to come from within the LDS Church. In 1967, future Mormon prophet Ezra Taft Benson, then a prominent church leader, came out publicly in support of presidential hopeful Ronald Reagan by stating, "[The] GOP will be making a mistake if it does not nominate a solid conservative candidate for President in 1968" (Utah Democrat 1967).

Further expressing his political views, Benson gave a formal speech that essentially chastised the Democratic Party and aligned his perceptions of government with the GOP platform. This 1968 speech, entitled "The Proper Role of Government," emphasized the need for stronger local government and for a less centralized federal government (Benson 1968). He unabashedly denounced social programs, claiming "No one has the authority to grant such powers, as welfare programs, schemes for redistributing the wealth, and

activities which coerce people into acting in accordance with a prescribed code of social planning" (Benson 1968). He compared having "a little bit of socialism" in government to having "a little bit of cancer." Benson detailed how simply ending welfare-state programming was the solution and that, with diligence, social programming could be phased out in ten to twenty years (1968).

While it was proper for Benson to disagree with social programs, particularly given his work experience as Secretary of Agriculture, his speech revealed an underlying message. Nearing the end of his oration, Benson began to make accusations towards "they," "them," "these," and "those," without being clear about exactly who "they" were. Said Benson (1968),

"There are those who think that because we now have the good things in life, we can afford to dispense with the foundations which have made them possible. *They* want to remove any recognition of God from governmental institutions. *They* want to expand the scope and reach of government which will undermine and erode our economic and personal freedoms. The abundance which is ours, the carefree existence which we have come to accept as a matter of course, can be toppled by *these* foolish experimenters and power seekers. By the grace of God, and with His help, we shall fence *them* off from the foundations of our liberty, and then begin our task of repair and construction" (emphasis added).

After opposing all Democratic ideals and endorsing Republican ones, it became very clear that *they* referred to the Democrats, just as it was clear that *He* referred to God. Whether or not Benson's opinions were correct, one could question the recklessness with which he made them public. As a respected and prominent LDS Church leader, Benson was undoubtedly aware of the strength in his sentiments. Benson was keen on bringing up religion and faith in this speech, which were obviously philosophies to which his audience subscribed. He described what he believed to be the definition of church and state, "I support the doctrine of separation of church and state as traditionally interpreted to prohibit the establishment of an official national religion. But I am opposed to the doctrine of separation of church and state as currently interpreted to divorce government from any formal recognition of God" (Benson 1968). He went on to say that he believes "the Constitution of the United States was prepared and adopted by men acting under inspiration from Almighty God." He also pronounced his subscription to the Divine Plan, part of which theorizes that government was instituted by God for the benefit of man (Benson 1968). Benson's role in the Church, his strong convictions regarding government, and his aptness to integrate his religion into his politics proved detrimental for the next decade of elections.

In 1967 a critical event occurred when BYU campus administration came out in support of the conservative platform. The school's executives publicly vowed to become "the most conservative university in the nation" (Utah Democrat 1967). Active BYU student Democrats opposed this action

and created a newsletter formally stating, “it [BYU’s campus] is being changed from an institution of higher learning into a propaganda agency for the Right Wing” (Utah Democrat 1967).

The 1967-68 period was a decisive time which shaped the way the LDS church involved itself in politics. On the horizon of a pivotal voting year, the church came out in support of GOP candidates (Utah Democrat 1967). The evidence of this influence was apparent in the voting pattern of Utahns as more members of the LDS Church began switching their vote to Republican. A 1967 poll taken by Dr. Frank Jonas showed that 36-43 percent of Utah Mormons were Republican, while 34-37 percent of Utah Mormons were Democrat (Utah Democrat 1967). This was one of the first polls that began to show a steady increase in the amount of LDS Republican voters.

#### **PARTY PLATFORMS AND THE RISE OF REPUBLICAN POWER**

In April 1968, Governor Rampton announced his candidacy for a second term. Sensing disdain for government during this era, he invited the public to participate in “platform hearings” (Utah Democrat 1968). These community hearings, open to all, were held to discuss current issues and government policy. A Democratic Party officer offered these sentiments,

Some people complain that their government is “distant” or “unaffected” by their real problems. This just isn’t so. The problem is that most people won’t take the time to become involved in the grassroots business of governing a community, county or state. The Democratic Party is ready, willing, and more than able to turn the people’s ideas into action. All they have to do is let us know, at these platform hearings, what they want (Utah Democrat 1968).

Recognizing the political influence the Church was having upon the community, the “platform hearings” were an attempt to reach out to the citizens of Utah. The dual purpose was to gain back faith in the government while promoting the Democratic Party as the vessel to do so. These hearings were relatively successful in that the official Utah Democratic Party Platform for the 1968 elections was derived directly from public input (Utah Democrat 1968).

The newly defined Utah Democratic Platform was strongly aligned with the National Democratic Platform. Equality for women and civil rights issues were addressed in each. Support for public and higher education also proved a compelling issue, with particular emphasis on higher per pupil spending and raising teachers’ salaries (Utah Democrat 1968). Environmental concerns were being addressed nationally by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Governor Rampton emphasized his support for this type of legislation by pledging to protect habitat and preserve beauty when building highways (Utah Democrat 1968).

Unique to Utah’s platform was the commitment to promote tourism. Governor Rampton vowed to create more state parks for camping, hiking, and boating, which in turn enabled him to address economic concerns (Utah Democrat 1968).

The platform also supported industry, focusing on Utah’s natural resources such as uranium, coal, oil shale, and minerals from the Great Salt Lake (Utah Democrat 1968). Adding to these issues, Governor Rampton supported better law enforcement through better training, better pay, and better public recognition of officers. He also supported higher safety in the workplace, a concern to many blue-collar members of the working and middle classes (Utah Democrat 1968). A December 1967 poll showed Rampton with an 85 percent approval rate (Eminhiser 1969). Rampton used these poll results when developing his 1968 campaign theme, “Rampton Gets Things Done” (Eminhiser 1969).

Bringing the public opinion to the forefront proved to be a successful strategy. For a state that elected a Republican president, nearly one-third of Utah voters crossed over to vote for Rampton, who won the 1968 race by an astonishing 30 percent (Eminhiser 1969). The Utah Democrat party overall though suffered significantly. According to then Democratic State Party Chairman John Klas, “Despite the smashing triumph of re-electing Governor Rampton by an overwhelming margin in the recent 1968 elections, still an overall reaction of Utah Democrats is marked by disappointment and pessimistic concern about the future role of the party in Utah” (Utah Democrat 1969). Klas’s sentiments reflected that Republican majorities were elected in both the House and Senate (Eminhiser 1969). Not coincidentally, it was at this time that LDS church leadership was making public statements aligning with the Republican platform.

Still, Utah Democrats were not at a total loss. They continued to win elections and even headlined their November 1972 newsletter, “Victory!” Governor Rampton was reelected to serve his third term in 1972, and in that same year two congressional seats were also won by Democrats. However, the 1974 and 1976 elections were overall losses for the Democrats, particularly in the Legislature (Dean 1983).

By the mid- and late-1970s, Utah Democrats were starting to look more in jeopardy and a few fresh Republican faces were ready to capitalize on that. Orrin Hatch, a virtual unknown at the time, ran for U.S. Senate in 1975 (Dean 1983). He surprised members of both political parties by beating out numerous political hopefuls to become a finalist in the Republican primary (Dean 1983). Hatch’s strategy in winning the convention battle was to rally support from the rising “right wing” sectors of the Republican Party, such as from the Eagle Forum and Grass Roots (Dean 1983). Hatch went on to win the primary and ultimately the general election over the three-term Democratic incumbent. He has proven to be the strongest Republican to hold that seat, having served for nearly thirty years. Undoubtedly, his support from conservative delegates has allowed him total control of the seat.

Another prominent Republican official, Jake Garn, was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1974. Garn was the only Republican Congressman at that time (Dean 1983). After the election of Hatch to the Senate in 1976, the two men gained political power, each from a very conservative base, and were

able to further mobilize the Utah Republican Party (Dean 1983).

Some of this capability stemmed from a national feeling of distrust in the government. The end of the Vietnam War, economic inflation, and Watergate, had all instilled a certain level of disdain for government (Dean 1983). Garn and Hatch offered an alternative to big government. This appealed to a large number of that sector of society, which was fed up with the increasing amount of federal dominance. The election of these two prominent Republican politicians gave rise to the conservative movement in the state of Utah.

Another decisive moment of the 70s came when, again, LDS Church leader Ezra Taft Benson was quoted in an interview with the *Alternative Press* saying, "it would be difficult for a Mormon to be a liberal Democrat if he was living the gospel and understood it" (Dean, 1983). This caused an uproar in Utah communities and drove even more of a wedge between the LDS Church and the Utah Democratic Party.

Benson's comment came in 1974, the same year that Utah Republicans gained control of both houses of the State Legislature (Dean 1983). The aftermath of Watergate seemed to give many Democrats a false sense of hope for the next election cycle and many saw the possibility of taking back the Presidency. This false hope seemed to cause Utah Democrats to lose momentum and over the next several years, they continued to lose seats to the GOP (Dean 1983). The 1978 elections were more than damaging to Utah Democrats. Republicans won fourteen of fifteen State Senate races (Utah State Legislature 2004). More importantly, five of the races lost were seats held by Democratic incumbents who were simply ousted by the omnipresent GOP. These new gains positioned the Republican Party in a two-to-one control of both houses of the Legislature (Dean 1983).

By 1980, Utah had converted to a more conservative view, an occurrence that was symptomatic of a larger national movement. The new President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, was a very conservative Republican. This year marked a significant low-point for the Democratic Party on both the national and state level.

United States Congressman Gunn McKay, a Democratic incumbent who had served ten years in Utah politics, was defeated by Republican challenger James Hansen (Dean, 1983). Most disturbingly, McKay had the reputation as a folksy, moderate, and respected legislator and was a member of the LDS Church. Sadly, his ten years of service and LDS background proved no match for the rapidly changing minds of Utah voters.

#### **BECOMING A REPUBLICAN SUPER-MAJORITY**

The reelected Democratic governor, Scott Matheson, was the only stronghold left for Utah Democrats (Utah Democrat 1980). However, even with his leadership the GOP had control of both houses in the Legislature and now had the two-thirds necessary to make any bill veto-proof (Dean 1983). This overwhelming control allowed the GOP to deliver what

Democrats perceived to be the final blow: a 1981 Legislative Reapportionment Committee whose sole purpose seemed to be the disbandment of the Utah Democratic Party. Even a former Republican legislator was quoted regarding the reapportionment as saying, "...[Y]ou have some goosenecks and strange aggregations of voters who have no common interests" (Dean 1983).

In many ways this was the final straw for some Democrats. In a 1982 interview, former State Party Chair John Klas expressed his frustration, "How can you ask me why the Democrats aren't up fighting? We've been fighting as hard as we can. It's starting to look like a stone wall out there, and a lot of people are just plain tired of beating their heads bloody with no effect" (Dean 1983).

A 1983 poll by the Hart Associates revealed that 70 percent of Mormons who attended church weekly were strong or leaning Republicans, with only 13 percent claiming to be Democrats (Dean 1983). Compared to the previously mentioned 1967 poll by Dr. Frank Jonas, Mormon Democrats had declined between 24 percent and 21 percent in just fifteen years. Democratic State Chairman Michael Miller summed it up, "I knew we had problems, but it's even worse than I believed. It's deeper in the fabric of the people than I believed" (Dean 1983).

By 1982, after a decade of losses, it was fair to say that Utah Democrats were doing little in the way of gaining grassroots support. The party had become very centered in Salt Lake County and Democratic leaders were accused of ignoring rural Utah. In fact, one rural legislative chair complained that he drove all the way from Southern Utah for a training session only to find that State Party leadership had cancelled the session but not informed anyone (Dean 1983). Needless to say, the lack of organization gave them little in the way of motivation to support the party.

Presumably, Democratic leadership at this time was feeling a bit hopeless and concluded the only races they had a chance of winning were in Salt Lake County. This philosophy, while it might have been true, was damaging to Utah Democrats because it further isolated rural counties already dominated by the GOP.

In 1984, the last Democratic stronghold, the governorship, was lost to the Republican Party. Republican Norm Bangerter beat Democrat Wayne Owens with a 56-44 percent margin (McCormick 2004). In the 1988 gubernatorial race, former Salt Lake City Mayor Ted Wilson ran on the Democratic ticket against Bangerter. The race was intense and the Democrats felt they had a real chance at taking the seat back. Also running in the race was Independent candidate Merrill Cook. The results were a devastating loss for the Democrats, with Bangerter narrowly winning by just a one percent margin (McCormick 2004).

The Republicans maintained control of the Legislature throughout the 90s and again made a pitch to redistrict in 1991 (Utah Democrat 1991). One of the most controversial tactics of the redistricting involved splitting Salt Lake County

between all three Congressional districts. With Salt Lake County providing for most of the liberal and Democratic population in the state, splitting it nearly ensured that a Democratic congressman would not be elected. Even so, Democrat Bill Orton shockingly beat Republican challenger Karl Snow in the third congressional district.

After the 1990 elections Democratic State Party Chair Mike Billings was quoted as saying, "It happened because we had better candidates who worked harder" (Utah Democrat 1991). Considering the other Democratic seats that were won during that election cycle, he may have been right. Four seats were gained in the House of Representatives and three were gained in the State Senate. Two out of three Congressional races resulted in Democratic wins. And most encouragingly, Democrats Randy Horiuchi and James Bradley beat out Republican incumbents for seats on the Salt Lake County Commission (Utah Democrat 1991). This came after fourteen years of GOP control.

Governor Bangerter left office in the early 1990s and was replaced by another Republican, Mike Leavitt. Democrats at this time held a respectable 31 seats in the House of Representatives and were holding on to ten seats in the State Senate (Utah State Legislature). Sadly though, the mid-1990s proved that these holdings were futile because by 1995 the number of Democrats in the House had dwindled all the way down to twenty and the Senate had still been unable to gain any seats (Utah State Legislature). The low numbers of seats held by Utah Democrats allowed the GOP the two-thirds control it needed and again, in 2002, the Legislature was redistricted. While damaging to the Democrats, the 2002 redistricting did not completely dismantle what was left of the party. However, the super-minority status of the Utah Democrats has remained.

#### DEFINING THE UTAH DEMOCRAT

The term liberal is commonly used to describe Democrats, but for many Utah Democrats it's starting to feel like a very dirty word. The powerful presence of Republican dominance has many Democrats feeling they must compromise in order to meet any goals. There is a certain negative stigma that is carried with the liberal label; therefore the idea of being a more moderate Democrat can be appealing for both personal and political reasons. Even the Utah State Democratic Party website headlines itself, "Moderate, Reasonable, and Open" (Utah State Democratic Party 2004). Democratic Party leaders realize that to win races they must show to Utah's largely conservative constituent base that not everything about Democrats swings far to the left. Even so, being called a liberal should not be something that a Utah Democrat has to fear. In a recent interview, Representative David Litvack (D-Salt Lake) stated,

I have no problem being labeled a liberal, [but] I know that many individuals within our party, the Democratic Party, do. I think it's not an issue of whether we are labeled liberal, or someone being labeled moderate, or conservative, it's the fact

that we have for too long allowed the other party, the Republican party, to define us and to define who Democrats are.... It's not the word liberal, it's the meaning they have put behind the word liberal. Because we have not grasped our own identity and sold ourselves, people's perception of what it means to be a Democrat in Utah is based on what they hear from the majority party (Litvak 2004).

This notion of being defined by the majority party seems not only to have become a problem for Democrats, but is even an issue within the GOP. When members of the Republican Party do not act conservatively enough to satisfy the right wing, they are labeled as moderates. Where a moderate Democrat is a good thing to the right-wing eye, a moderate Republican is most certainly not. Again, it is the labeling that has become the problem. The parties have allowed the words "liberal" and "moderate" to supersede all other aspects of an elected official's persona.

Interestingly, defining the difference between a moderate Democrat and a liberal Democrat in Utah often involves turning back to the issue of religion. Most of the Utah Democrats labeled as moderates subscribe to the LDS faith. This makes sense given the fact that nationally a correlation can be drawn between conservatism and religious affiliation (Gallup Poll 2003). Conversely, many liberals are unlikely to subscribe to a religion. Hence, many Utah Democrats are not members of the LDS faith.

This has created some friction within the Utah Democratic Party. Some of the more liberal Democrats view the moderates as not supporting the party. These moderate Democrats often find themselves in the position of having to choose between conservative constituents whom they are elected to represent and voting against the party. This is particularly true for Democrats that are elected in parts of the southern area of the Wasatch Front, certain areas of Salt Lake's east bench, and parts of rural Utah, said Representative Litvack (2004). These areas are shown to have more politically conservative residents. Elected Democrats in those areas have the difficult task of trying to appease those conservative voters, who are often vital to their reelection.

The fact is, Utahns are inevitably faced with the unique challenge of a single, predominant religion to which a majority of the population belongs. Based on the simple notion previously stated, that religious groups tend to be more conservative, it follows that those who are members of the LDS faith tend to lean more conservatively. However, conservatism does not equate to Republicanism. Historical evidence has been provided that shows Utahns have been misled to believe there is no place for an LDS Democrat. Ironically, many LDS Church values are in line with Democratic values. For example, the LDS Church plays a huge role in helping to serve the community through giving aid to the needy, poor, and destitute, engaging in community service, helping the elderly, giving money to charitable organizations, etc. All of these are very much Democratic values. Some Church members point to principles as basic as the Ten Commandments to explain

their identification with the Democratic Party. For instance, several BYU College Democrats stated to the *Daily Universe* that they vote Democrat because of the commandment to “love thy neighbor” (Hubbs 2004). This evidence, while anecdotal, highlights the point that Mormons may choose to be Democrats without experiencing a complete crisis of faith.

Even still, it is in the very fabric of Utah communities that members of the LDS church are Republicans and those who are not members of the Church are Democrats. The few members of the Church that have been willing to step outside this stereotype have often found themselves persecuted, both within their communities and within the parties. This duality often has LDS Democrats finding themselves in political dilemmas. As one BYU College Democrat stated, “I would love to have a candidate that was pro-life and also pro-environment, but, unfortunately, they don’t exist” (Hubbs, 2004).

One Utah politician has survived this dual role, but not totally unscathed. Utah Congressman Jim Matheson, an LDS Democrat, has struggled significantly to find his political identity. Matheson has been fingered by some Utah Democrats as not representing the party. In fact, a *Deseret Morning News* report recently showed that Matheson does side with Republican President George W. Bush 56 percent of the time (Davidson 2004). Matheson addresses these accusations by stating, “I try to be an independent voice for Utah.... I look at an issue based on merit, not on who is for or against it” (Davidson 2004). One way Matheson acts on this belief is by co-chairing the House Blue Dog Coalition, an informal group of fiscally conservative Democrats and Republicans (Blue Dog Coalition 2005). Matheson is a living, breathing example of what it is to mix personal belief systems with the will of constituencies. While this may satisfy some, many of Matheson’s Democratic colleagues are currently upset with his politics. Most recently, Matheson voted with Bush in support of the Constitutional Amendment to define marriage. This action has invoked anger and resentment from members of the Democratic LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual) caucus, once strong supporters of Congressman Matheson.

What is the solution that will connect all members of the Utah Democratic Party? It is actually quite simple, but much easier said than done. The party must allow for diversity to exist and must accept that not all members of the party will feel the same on every issue. Representative David Litvack had some insight on this subject:

You’re creating a party that recognizes diversity.... You’ve got to create space within the party for that range of viewpoints.... It’s about finding the common ground. It’s about creating that space that allows diversity within our party, but also finding the common ground in other places that’s going to be stronger than what the differences are (Litvack 2004).

Litvack believes that recognizing and welcoming diversity is key to the success of the Democratic Party and that it will help to build stronger communities. He expounded upon this idea,

Building a more united community is about, one, building a strong foundation based on commonality, which on a very fundamental level is humanness. And two, you also have to build a community that allows that space for our differences.... And so that’s what we need to do as a party, find that common ground that is strong enough, that’s binding, but will allow for that diversity, that dialogue where people don’t feel threatened who disagree with certain things (2004).

Representative Litvack is correct in his thinking. For Utah Democrats to ever regain power, a united Democratic Party must be a priority. This means not only welcoming diversity into the party but more importantly, changing the minds of Utah voters. The Democrats will never regain power if they cannot find a way to reconnect with the LDS population. The dilemma is that tolerance of diversity is not a political issue and cannot be done from a political agenda. These issues stem deeper into the people of Utah and have been fostered for so long they seem to have taken on a life of their own. The only way these attitudes will ever change is if the LDS communities themselves begin to recognize that Utah Democrats are not antithetical to their beliefs. This would entail some very brave members of the LDS faith stepping out to protest what so many in their communities condone: one-sided political ideologies.

### CONCLUSION: UTAH DEMOCRATS AND THE 2004 ELECTION

Utah’s Democrats faced a great challenge in the 2004 elections. After decades of losses a quick turnaround was unrealistic and unlikely. Nonetheless, there seemed to be a buzz among the party unlike one that had been seen in a very long time. Passion stemming from both local and national issues seemed to energize many citizens, activating the Utah Democratic Party unlike it had been in decades.

Democrats in Utah took action by turning out in record numbers to primary elections, precinct caucus meetings, and county conventions (Pignanelli and Webb 2004). Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson said to a reporter with the *Salt Lake Tribune*, “We have an astounding chance to turn things around for the good of our nation, the good of our planet and the good of future generations” (Burr 2004). Utah Democratic State Party Chairman Donald Dunn stated repeatedly, “It’s a new day for the Democrats. We’re going to have packed meetings. We’re going to win races” (Burr 2004). Dunn proved himself right regarding the packed meetings. But in many ways, the Democratic Party suffered in the 2004 elections.

Nationally, Democrats lost seats in both the U.S. House and Senate, and lost the presidency. Utah Democrats, however, made better progress locally than did the national Democrats: Utah Congressman Jim Matheson won by a significant margin, a Democratic Salt Lake County Mayor and a Democratic County Council member were elected, and two State House seats and one State Senate seat were also won by Democrats (Dunn 2004). The disapproval that citizens from

various demographics and political affiliations showed towards the Utah State Legislature prior to Election Day seemed to have little effect on voting patterns (Pignanelli and Webb 2004). The call for balance in a state dominated by one political party seemed to be heard, but was given marginal consideration.

These losses only reflect the grassroots work that still needs to be done if Democrats are ever going to be understood and embraced by more members of the LDS faith. The pervasive idea that Mormons and Democrats cannot mix will be difficult to overcome. The effort to do so could take decades and even generations to accomplish, but it is not impossible. Democrats are hard at work creating a new party platform and strategizing for the 2006 election. The political climate in Utah has remained relatively stable for a long time. Change is something that is inevitable and with perseverance, the Utah Democratic Party only has room to grow.

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